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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINS](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: POSSIBLE DEAL FOR WARRI POLITICAL IMPASSE

REF: ABUJA 816 AND PREVIOUS

Classified by Ambassador Howard F. Jeter for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

1.(C) Post's Corporate Responsibility Officer (CRO) met with Temi Harriman, the National Assembly Representative (PDP) for the Warri area, on May 13 in Abuja. Although she characterized polling in her constituency on both April 12 and 19 (National Assembly and Presidential/Gubernatorial elections, respectively) as almost non-existent, she refrained from casting doubt on her renewed electoral mandate. She felt she was a strong candidate for Deputy Speaker of the House, a position to be decided at a May 22 PDP meeting in Port Harcourt.

2.(C) Commenting on the ongoing crisis in the Warri area, Harriman, an Itsekiri, blamed the new outbreak of violence on Ijaw youth in the Warri Southwest Local Government Area (LGA). She rejected Ijaw claims that this LGA is populated predominantly by Ijaws. Similarly, she dismissed Ijaw demands to control the majority of the LGA's 10 electoral wards, six of which are currently controlled by Itsekiri. Nevertheless, she emphasized that her constituency, the three LGAs of Warri, include substantial numbers of Ijaw and Uhrobos in addition to her fellow Itsekiri; she claimed to be working with moderate Ijaw leaders who in turn have given her political support.

3.(C) During the meeting at Harriman's Abuja residence, Jefferson Arubi, the PDP candidate for the Chairman of the Warri Southwest local government area, arrived with an "emergency" issue to discuss with Harriman. According to the visibly agitated Arubi, the Delta PDP had just reassigned him to run for the lower office of Deputy Chairman, while elevating an Ijaw candidate to the Chairmanship candidacy. Arubi claimed this was the handiwork of Delta Governor James Ibori (PDP); Arubi said he had been told that any attempt to resist this change would lead to his expulsion from the party.

4.(C) Harriman's immediate response was negative, because Warri Southwest LGA had been historically controlled by Itsekiri. Upon reflection, however, she noted that this was likely an attempt by the Presidency to ameliorate the Warri crisis by giving the Ijaw a taste of political power in Warri. She advised Arubi to accept the Deputy Chairman position and inform the Ijaw candidate that the Itsekiri have accepted this move in the name of peace. The Ijaw should not, however, consider the arrangement permanent; in four years the Chairmanship should revert to Itsekiri control.

5.(C) Comment: The militant Ijaw youth of Warri have vowed to block the June 21 LGA elections. Ijaws fear the Itsekiri will dominate the elections. The effort to give the Chairmanship of the LGA to the Ijaw certainly looks like an attempt to help defuse the crisis. While this solution is a stop-gap measure and does not address the fundamental Ijaw grievances of the Warri Southwest LGA, it offers the Ijaw tangible political concessions that might help ease tensions. This gesture by itself, however, is probably inadequate to mollify the Ijaw militants. The challenge will now be for traditional Ijaw leaders such as Chief E.K. Clark to "sell" this development as a meaningful gain to the rebellious, sometimes criminally inclined, Ijaw youth in the marshy areas of Warri.

JETER